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ABSTRACT

An important feature of the sentence in any language is its thematic structure, new/given information organization. It has been found that in English, where word order is grammatically determined, the thematic structure is signalled by the place of the sentence stress. If an indefinite noun (new information) is present in the sentence, it bears the stress in non-contrastive intonation, no matter what its function and position is. In the presence of a definite noun, the stress falls on the element in sentence-final position, or on the preceding element if nothing follows the noun. Any violation of word order or the place of the stress gives a contrastive reading. In Polish, where grammatical functions are indicated by endings, the thematic structure is signalled by word order and sentence stress. Neutrally, the stress falls on the new information, i.e., on the non-coreferential noun, and it is placed as far to the end of the sentence as possible, new information moving with it. Thus, in English, the stress on new information and SVO order are constants, given/new information organization a variable; in Polish, stress on new information and given/new order are constants, SVO order a variable. Any violation of one of the constants leads to a contrastive reading. (Author)

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THE THEMATIC STRUCTURE OF THE SENTENCE IN ENGLISH AND POLISH

In 1976 Krzeszowski wrote that when comparing systems in languages we may have three situations:

1. when an item X in a language L_i is identical with an item Y in a language L_j in one or more than one respects,
2. when an item X in L_i is different from an equivalent item Y in L_j,
3. when an item X in L_i has no equivalent in L_j.

One of the important features of the sentence in any language is its relation to other sentences in a text (sequence of sentences). It is one of those relations that are indispensable in a sequence of sentences, if the sequence is to be a coherent text. One of the forms in which this relation is expressed is the thematic organization of the sentence in terms of given and new information.

The thematic organization of the sentence was described early in this century by Vilém Mathesius, and later by other Prague School linguists (Daneš, Firbas).

Mathesius (1941) described `theme´ (zaklad) as that which is known or at least obvious in the given situation, and from which the speaker proceeds in his discourse. He says that "No theme can be established within a sentence if none of the sentence elements conveys a piece of information that is either known or at least obvious in the given situation. This is illustrated by the existential type of sentence Byl jednou jeden král [Was once one king], occurring at the beginning of narration [...] By way of anticipation, as it were, this type selects from a situation not yet described some local or

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temporal setting, giving its verbal expression front position and making it function as theme."

Mathesius also noticed that word order performs different functions in different languages. In English, for example, word order is used to express the grammatical (subject-verb -object) structure of the sentence. However, further studies of word order in English and other languages have clearly shown that there is a tendency to put the new information as far to the end of the sentence as possible, or for the given information to precede new information. E.g., Isačenko (1966) found that in German the 'given' object precedes the 'new' object regardless of their further specification (direct, indirect). One of the devices to put 'new' information in sentence non-initial position in English is "there is ..." construction.

Since in English the word order is grammatically determined, the thematic organization of the sentence must be expressed in some other way.

In 1967 Daneš (also Halliday (1967), Postal (1971) and many others) suggested that the place of the sentence stress plays a crucial role in the thematic structure of the sentence.

If we compare two similar sentences (1) and (2)

(1) He was reading a book

(2) He was reading the book

we find that when we read them with what can be called neutral intonation, in (1) the sentence stress falls on book, in (2) it falls on reading.

This comparison gives us ground for the following conclusion: the sentence stress falls on the indefinite noun in sentence final position (Halliday (1967) says that the sentence stress falls on "the final element of clause structure unless this contains only 'fully grammatical items'") if such a noun is present; it falls on the verb if the noun is preceded by the definite article.

Let us consider next (3) and (4)

(3) He bought a book yesterday

(4) He bought the book yesterday

with regard to the place of the sentence stress.

Notice first that (3) is similar to (1) in that the sentence stress falls on the indefinite noun. (4), however, has its sentence stress not on the verb but on the adverbial, in agreement with the general tendency to have the noncontrastive stress as far to the end of the sentence as possible.

Sentences with the indefinite noun in initial position are perhaps less frequent, but (5)

(5) A man was coming

is a perfectly correct sentence. Observe that a) sentence stress falls on the indefinite noun in the initial position, and b) it is a noncontrastive stress. It may be a sequence sentence to something like (6)

(6) I heard footsteps and turned round

(5) A man was coming

The stress on the final element coming does not make sense in the context of (6).

A similar sentence (7)

(7) The man was coming

with the definite noun in initial position will have the neutral stress on the verb. The above brief discussion allows the following conclusions to be made:

I. If an indefinite noun is present in the sentence it bears the sentence stress in neutral (noncontrastive) intonation (examples (1), (3), (5)), no matter what its function and position is in the sentence.

II. In the presence of a definite noun, the sentence stress falls on the final element (example (4)), or on the preceding element if nothing follows the noun (example (2)).

Any violation of the place of the sentence stress or word order, as examples (8)-(13) demonstrate, results in a contrastive reading:

(8) He was reading a book
(9) He was reading a book
(10) He was reading a book
(11) He was reading a book (with an extra heavy stress)
(12) A book he was reading
(13) Reading he was a book

or in a non-sentence, like (14)

(14) Was reading he a book.

As regards Polish it is worth keeping in mind that nouns are inflected and functions of nouns in the sentence are expressed not through word order as in English, but through endings. That lead Polish linguists to believe that word order in Polish is free, since subject and object nouns could be found in both sentence initial and sentence final position. With the development of Functional Sentence Perspective it has become clear that in various languages word order is used to convey various meanings (cf. Mathesius 1941). Experiments that I carried out in 1973 confirmed the assumption that word order in Polish is not free. Consider the following examples:

(15) Mężczyzna bił kobietę
(Man (Nom) hit woman (Acc))

(16) Kobietę bił mężczyzna
(Woman (Acc) hit man (Nom)).

If we treat these sentences as sequence sentences and test them against two opening sentences, each with one of the two nouns (kobietę and mężczyzna)introduced in it, as in (17) and (18)

(17) Widziałem na ulicy mężczyznę
(I saw on street man (Acc))

(18) Widziałem na ulicy kobietę
(I saw on street woman (Acc))

we will find that the noun repeated in the sequence sentence must occupy sentence initial position, while the new noun occupies sentence final position. Any violation of this rule results in an incorrect sequence of sentences.

The next point that I would like to discuss here is the role of sentence stress in the thematic interpretation of the sentence in Polish. As experiments have shown the sentence stress in neutral intonation falls on new information. And thus, in the sequence (17)-(15) the stress in (15) is on the noun kobietę, in the sequence (18)-(16) it falls on the noun mężczyzna. If both nouns have been mentioned previously as, for example, in (19)

(19) Widziałem na ulicy mężczyznę i kobietę
(I saw on street man (Acc) and woman (Acc))

the only correct, neutral sequence sentence is (20)

(20) Mężczyzna bił kobietę
(Man (Nom) hit woman (Acc))

The conclusions as to the role of the sentence stress and word order in the thematic structure in Polish are as follows:

I. The normal stress is placed on a lexical item in sentence final position (examples (15), (16)). If this lexical item happens to be a noun with a coreferential interpretation (example (20)) the stress moves to the preceding element.

II. The normal sentence stress falls on the `new´ information in the sentence (noncoreferential nouns in (15), (16), or on the verb in (20)); it follows that it falls on the noun interpreted as noncoreferential (`new´ information), no matter what the grammatical function of the noun is, and that nouns which are to have a coreferential interpretation never bear the `normal´ sentence stress.

I and II put together account for changes in the word order in Polish which may be briefly described as follows:

III. Since the normal sentence stress is placed at the end of the sentence and at the same time it marks `new´ noncoreferential noun, it is the `new´ noun that is placed in sentence final position under stress, regardless of the grammatical function it has in the sentence. This explains the grammatical freedom of word order in Polish, the freedom of the subject and the object to take any position in the sentence.

Three features have been discussed above with respect to English and Polish: grammatical word order (SVO), thematic word order, and the place of sentence stress. We have seen that in English SVO order and the place of sentence stress (on `new´ information) are constants, while in Polish the constant features are the thematic word order and the place of sentence stress. Thematic word order in English and grammatical word order in Polish are variable. This can be pre-

sented in the following table:

	English	Polish
$constant_1$	néw	néw
$constant_2$	SVO	given/new information
variable	given/new information	SVO

Any violation of one of the constants leads to a contrastive meaning.

Naturally, one would hardly find a text with the above pattern (i.e. something like $S_1(x_1)$. $S_2(x_1-x_2)$. $S_3(x_2-x_3)$. $S_4(x_3-x_4)$...) throughout. Variation comes from a number of possibilities such as contrast, ellipsis, semantic anaphora, distant reference, various relations between sentences (causal, temporal, etc.). What governs the choice of these possibilities is still a problem for future research.

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